

The Centuries, Not The Decades



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Over fifty years ago, in the 1970s, my concern was the next political confrontation, the next street fight with political opponents, the next piece of propaganda I would produce, motivated as I was by a Certitude-of-Knowing, a fanaticism, born of the belief that I had found the right answers, the right solutions, to certain problems of a political and social kind.

Now, after decades of practical experience which included two terms of imprisonment, the loss of two loved ones, travels in various foreign lands, and a decade and more of working with my hands in rural occupations, my concern has become my Uncertainty-of-Knowing: of how and why my earlier hubris has, mostly against my will, somehow given way to an often wordless appreciation and a wordless knowing of Nature and of my place as one fallible mortal temporarily living, for only some decades, on one planet orbiting one Star in one Galaxy among a Universe of billions of Galaxies. Of how I owe a debt, have an obligation, to Nature - *Debitum Naturæ* - and almost certainly a debt to whatever is or was the genesis of Nature, of the variety of life, here and possibly elsewhere in the Cosmos.

There thus has developed in me a perspective far beyond politics and far beyond the years and the decades where those with a political or a religious Certitude-of-Knowing try from whatever motive, or some scheming, to change what-is to what they, or others whose authority they accept, believe should-be based on some personal or adopted political or religious or social certitude. For all they seem to have done or do is perpetuate the cycle of suffering as I perpetuated it during my decades as a political and then as a religious fanatic.

This new perspective of mine is of the centuries yet to be and of how we as individuals can cease to interfere, from whatever motive, in the world beyond our own personal world because while such interference may in some circumstances change and often has changed our and other societies temporarily 'for the better' such change does not, in the perspective of centuries, last. A revolution here; a change of government; a war there; an invasion of this or that land; repressive laws; the extra-judicial killing or assassination of this or that official or leader...

There are so many examples over so many centuries. Did the brutality of ancient Rome - the slaughter of Boudica and her followers not long after her victory over the Ninth Legion; the killings, including the murder of Cicero, during the Second Triumvirate; the crucifixion of thousands of followers of Spartacus along the Appian Way; the crucifixion of Jesus and the killing of many early Christians - prevent the fall of the Roman Empire? Did the First and Second World Wars, with their millions of people killed, solve the internal problems of, for example, America and Britain: the poverty; the deprivation, the inequality that still haunts them? Et cetera.

Yet we always find excuses for ourselves, for others: that 'next time it will be different' and that some existing government or some newly declared enemy foreign or domestic 'must be opposed and defeated' by whatever means because 'we' are right and 'they' are wrong. Thus does the internal violence, the hatred and often the internal repression, and the foreign killing and the destruction, continue decade after decade, century following century.

Is this all that we are or all we can be? Decades ago in one of those rare perceptions of acausal Time, I vainly tried to express in words that fleeting perception of another world, of another way of living. ¹ But as so often between 1968 and 2006 it was, as other such moments were, forgotten in the maelstrom formed by still believed-in causal impersonal abstractions and by my arrogant belief that I should, must, change what-is to what I hubriatically believed it should-be.

I needed to resist, then; I should have resisted, remembering. But remembering and resisting what? Remembering the deeds done; the suffering caused; resisting the hubris that vivified my personal life, manifest as my hubris was in a personal Certitude-of-Knowing. Now, almost every day, I strive to remember in words such as this the long and difficult journey from city-street to farm-field, from battle-song to plainchant to rural silence, conveyed as I seem to have been to move beyond causal impersonal abstractions to a consideration of the centuries not the decades.

And what you thought you came for
Is only a shell, a husk of meaning
From which the purpose breaks only when it is fulfilled
If at all. Either you had no purpose

Or the purpose is beyond the end you figured
And is altered in fulfilment. ²

David Myatt
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Snow, hill-whitening, while a cool Sun journeys
Slowly
Beyond the cloud
That touches the Mynd in a slow dance
Of beauty.

There is a moment, of youthful hope:
A Thrush to descend down to pick
The storm-red berries from a grey-green tree
Of holly
Stout, strong, from more than ten-score Sun-warmed
Summers.

It is the twilight time, of life:
There is no music, no painting, no books in preparation
For this
As if the labours of those who artfully laboured
Went unremarked, misunderstood
Thousand year upon thousand year:
Few seeds sown, as berries sow new life.

Yet I heard them call out, once, often, in a dreamful youth
When hilltop viewing at night beneath
A night of stars
Knowing no difference because I had yet to learn
As adults learn
To constrict the flow of Thought:
One individual, striving, among so many
With so many needs
To feed our flow of life.

But there is a learning here
As a breeze, gusting cold, moves cloud
To free the blue-beauty which is our planet's sky:
A remembering
Of the empathy
Which is, should be, our individual evolution
Of life.

c.1980

[2] TS Eliot: Little Gidding

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Image credit:

Travelling home after a day working on a farm near Malvern.
Surveillance photograph, Spring 2000,
by a Private Investigator hired by the BBC